

Islamic Perspectives on Nutrition

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to provide a review on the literature related to nutrition. I will commence with an overview of the relevant Islamic literature, as well as on the contemporary academic literature concerning the Islamic theological injunctions and guidelines existing in the primary sources of Islam, namely, the holy *Qur'ān* and the prophetic *Sunnah*.

I will follow this discussion by focussing on the sources of Islamic legislation and on the Islamic concept on nutrition, by bringing into perspective the theories of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī and Ḥāmid al-Takrūrī. This explanation will gain further support in some of the commentaries of various authors and intellectuals, who have contributed to Islamic knowledge. In conclusion, this article will provide an analysis on how Islam has taken social solidarity into consideration.^[1]

Keywords

Nutrition, food security, contestation, feeding, *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām*.

Introduction

Islam is a universal religion comprising of perfect legislation for all aspects and for all types of life. Muslims believe that the laws of Islam, contained in the holy *Qur'ān* and in the prophetic *Sunnah*, are suitable for every era of civilisation. These laws consist of an immense variety of categories pertaining to daily life, on a level that interacts with each individual, as well as with communities and with society. Moreover, these Islamic regulations seek to address the basic needs of human beings.

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as a matrix of wealth and property. The Meccans were a proud and arrogant nation. They used to oppress the poor and the weak amongst them, and were stingy by nature. What's more, they would treat their idols better than the way in which they treated other human beings. Their prejudice was based on the ideas of social classification, which they imbibed and practiced as a community.

The Meccan *surahs* of the *Qur'ān* and the *Ḥadīth* literature on this subject corroborate the proposition that the rich classes exploited the poor... *Sūrah al-Takāthur* also indicates the Meccans' devotion to wealth and riches in the early days of Islam. Hence, we find in the Meccan *surahs* much emphasis on feeding of the indigents and maintaining social justice.^[2]

Islam aims at maintaining a society based on religion,

morality and social justice. It seeks to solve the economic problem by means of its moral teachings as well its legislation. Hence, the *Qur'ān*'s repeated emphasis on the feeding of the poor. The whole *Sūrah al-Mā'ūn* is devoted to this theme.^[3]

Likewise, the *Encyclopedia of Religion* highlights this practice amongst the foremost Muslims in Mecca. As a result of their acceptance of Islam and their observance of its teachings, they recognised that Islam is “the name of a total way of life and does not merely regulate the individual's private relationship with God.”^[4]

Therefore, the aims of present study were to establish a system for studying nutritional verses of the holy *Qur'ān* and practice of these verses existing in the Prophetic *Sunnah*, as well as to determine all subject matter related to nutritional concepts.^[5]

Materials and Methods

In this descriptive analytical study to identify the Qur'anic concept of nutrition, I used commentaries on the Qur'anic revelation and contemporary studies.

Numerous Qur'anic verses mention nutrition, nutritional concepts, as well as various kinds of foods with nutritious value. The *Journal of Religion and Health* consists of scholarly explications on these topics. An article in the journal makes mention that 64 keywords and 257 verses on nutrition were identified in the holy *Qur'ān*. The writers of this article cite the following keywords in respect of the Qur'anic discourse regarding lawful and unlawful food, and conceptualisations of nutrition:

halal, *haram*, eating, drinking/water, bread, seed, meat, poultry, cattle, cow, camel, sheep, pig, egg, legume, lentil, dairy, fruit, vegetables

(onion, cucumber, pumpkin), fruits (banana, palm/date, grapes, fig, pomegranate), oil, fat, olives, suet, cedar, camphor, ginger, mustard, honey hunger, obesity, leanness, thirst and salt.^[6]

Additionally, this article relies on the theories of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī (d. 505 H/1111) and Ḥāmid al-Takrūrī. In order to develop an understanding of the meanings of keywords, I have utilised the *Bender's Dictionary of Nutrition and Food*

Results

Countless scholars in successive generations authored works on Qur'anic exegesis, which consist of useful discussions involving food, its production, and its consumption.^[7]

There also exists a vast collection of scholarly

research, including dissertations on the scholarly outlook concerning the dire need for food security and the significance of eating food with good nutritious value.

Numerous verses of the holy *Qur'ān* highlight the significance of both food and nourishment as great blessings from Allāh. These verses also consist of instructions involving food and its consumption, as well as the importance of social giving. These matters are directly linked to the concept of nutrition, which is an important Islamic teaching that is essential for our survival and our prosperity in harmony with the rest of creation.

The holy *Qur'ān* contains some guidelines for health promotion amongst human beings. It appeals to the entire human race in its address to them concerning their nutrition, as well as the types of food that they consume, “Oh people! Eat of what the earth contains of lawful, pure

foods and do not emulate the footsteps of the devil. Surely, he is an open enemy to you.”^[8]

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Discussion

The explications from the holy *Qur'ān*, the *Sunnah* and from the publications produced by scholars

throughout the generations expound on the fact that it is the duty of a human being to eat food and to cater for his/her own needs. The strength and health of the body and the soul have to be looked after, which is the most important requirement of nutrition.^[10]

In all cases, Islam highly recommends that the food is of a pure nature since the food will then have a higher nutritional value. On the authority of al-Ālūsī pure foods may be defined as follows:

The word used by Allāh, *ṭayyiban* (pure) is an attribute of *ḥalālān* (lawful), which is denoted in the statement of Imam Mālik as food enjoyed by one who eats lawful foods without any expression of detest or dislike in any way. It may also be regarded by such a person as pure without bearing any resemblance to impurity. The useful

mentioning of *ḥalālān* here to describe the type of food demonstrates that this law applies generally, just as in the verse: “And there is no living creature on the earth...” Hence, the verse is a response to those who prohibit certain kinds of lawful foods.^[11]

The Islamic concept of nutrition as the holy *Qur’ān* and the prophetic *Sunnah* contextualise essentially relates to it being a basic need for God’s creation to harmoniously survive and exist. Certainly, the provision of these needs should not be underestimated.

Al-Aṣfahānī’s book, *Al-Ṭharī’ah fī Makārim al-Sharī’ah*, offers an amazing exposition on the life of human beings, their basic needs and desires. Al-Aṣfahānī elucidates on the value of human life by stating that: “There is no way for human beings to achieve their

purpose of serving Allāh except if they feed themselves, thereby seeing to their own nutrition.”^[12]

Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī (d. 505H/1111) illustrates this theory in his book, *Iḥyā ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, in the chapter on *The Propriety of Eating*, as follows:

There is no way that the body will be sound without nutrition and other forms of strength, which should be consumed by human beings at repeated intervals and in balance with their needs. Hence, from this viewpoint, some of the Pious Predecessors have stated: “The act of eating food is a fundamental principle of Islam. This meaning is implied by the Creator of all existence: “Eat of the wholesome foods and carry out righteous actions.”^[13]

Scholarly definitions on nutrition deliver a

comprehensive connotation to the term as implied in human sciences today. Nutrition is defined in the *Benders’ Dictionary of Nutrition and Food Technology* as, “the process by which living organisms take in and use food for the maintenance of life, growth, the functioning of organs and tissues and the production of energy; the branch of science that involves these processes.”^[14]

Ḥāmid al-Takrūrī outlines various connotations pertaining to the study of nutrition:

The science of nutrition is that kind of knowledge that explores the relationship between food and the living body. This study includes the way in which food is processed in the body, its digestion and absorption, as well as its metabolism in the body. Nutrition further entails what the intake of food yields during the release of vital strength

that is essential for life and for reproduction amongst living beings, as well as for the preservation of food textures and its production such as the manufacture of eggs and milk.

Additionally, nutrition also includes the way in which living beings eliminate waste matter from the body... The science of nutrition as it is presently known developed during the 19th century from chemistry and physiology, and then advanced into an independent branch of knowledge in the current age, although there lies a focus on the combination of various disciplines within its domain. Nutrition has an inveterate link to other fundamental branches of knowledge, as well as to the sciences of medicine, human sciences, agricultural sciences, economic

sciences and sciences of business administration.^[15]

Moreover, researchers and academic scholars have deeply reflected on the consumption of nutritious foods, acknowledging that this consumption is of utmost importance to the preservation of the human body. This intake, undoubtedly, plays a substantial role in the health, as well as in the personal wellbeing of a human being. However, many of these foods may be acquired through various means of production and distribution, which also have an impact on the quality and types of foods that the consumers obtain and eat.

The holy *Qur'ān* explicitly announces to humanity the significance of reflecting on food and nutrition:

Let the human being contemplate over his food.
How We have poured the water in torrents. Then

We broke open the earth splitting it into sprouts. We caused the grain to grow within it, grapes and herbage, olive and palm trees, gardens of dense shrubbery and fruit and grass. These are all an enjoyment for you and for your grazing livestock.^[16]

Thus, Islam confers an open invitation to human beings, highly recommending and encouraging them to make advancements in the study of all beneficial disciplines of knowledge. The underlying factors that envelope this education in the Islamic outlook is the imbibing of sincerity and moral fibre. Allāh applauds those who become the embodiments of exemplary conduct and noteworthy disposition. The importance of nutrition in the life of a human being has a major impact on his/her behaviour, since seeing to the fulfilment of a person's

needs in relation to food and nourishment is a necessity.^[17]

Islam considers decorum to be the foundation of all forms of worship and human interaction. The holy *Qur'ān* profoundly addresses humanity concerning the act of eating, "Oh people! Eat of what the earth contains of lawful, pure foods and do not emulate the footsteps of the devil. Surely, he is an open enemy to you."^[18]

This verse points out that eating should be done in moderation, without starving oneself or overindulging to such an extent that it will cause harm to the body and health. This is the first Islamic principle concerning the consumption of food, i.e. there should be no harm caused to the body. The second principle of this consumption expounds on cleanliness. A Muslim is constantly required to maintain a state of total cleanliness. Abū Mālik al-

Ash'arī (may Allāh be well pleased with him) reported that the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) said:

Cleanliness is half of faith and praising Allāh fills one's scale of good deeds. Glorifying Allāh and praising him (above everything else) occupies the space between the heavens and the earth. Devotional prayers are a form of manifest light, charity is a form of evidence (for the one who observes it) and patience is like a lamp. The *Qur'ān* will either defend you or account against you (on the day of reckoning). Every person is travelling the journey and will reap his/her own remuneration. Hence, everyone is partaking in a trade involving his/her own neck, for which the result will be either self-salvation or self-

destruction.^[19]

The same quality of cleanliness has to exist in the food consumed. Lawful foods are by their nature, considered as pure but if mixed with an unlawful substance (e.g. alcohol) they become impure. Similarly, lawful foods mixed with impure substances (e.g. dirt) become impure.^[20]

The Islamic legislation ordains other forms of purification as well such as the washing of the hands and keeping ablution prior to and, during the consumption of food. Eating in a state of ablution (*wuḍū*) has also been highly recommended by the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) who is reported to have said, "Performing ablution before eating food abolishes poverty and it also removes the traces of small faults."^[21]

The reason for this recommendation is that the hands always feel tardy due to being overworked. Thus, washing

the hands is a quick way of cleansing them, thereby keeping them pure from the effects of sin. Moreover, partaking of a meal with the intention that it will assist one in carrying out the Islamic requirements is a form of worship. The washing of the hands before eating would hence, aptly apply at such times, since it bears the same value of being in a state of purification before performing prayers.^[22]

Cleanliness is a prerequisite of devotional prayers, which assists one in gaining proximity to Allāh and in maintaining a well-balanced, healthy body and soul. For instance, the washing of the hands thrice before, as well as after eating is important to ensure cleanliness of the body. By carrying out this practice one can ensure that germs do not enter the body. The Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) is reported to have said,

“The strong believer is more loved to Allāh than the weak one and there is benefaction in both.”^[23]

Amira Ayad provides elaboration on this prophetic tradition, “This *ḥadīth* demonstrates the importance of taking good care of your body, keeping it fit, healthy and strong, as a strong body holds the potential for a powerful soul, a sound personality and a wise intellect.”^[24]

The connection between the body and the soul regains further momentum through one’s ritual worship and supererogatory acts of devotion. The Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) highly recommended the uttering of Allah’s name before eating and expressing gratitude to Him after one has completed the meal. A well-known *ḥadīth* makes it clear that, “Every act of importance that does not begin with the praise of Allāh is cut off from His mercy.”^[25]

In another *ḥadīth*, Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) is reported to have taught his companion, Mu'āṭh (may Allāh be well pleased with him), to abide by the following etiquette when eating, “Oh young man! Utter the name of Allāh, eat with your right hand and eat what is front of you.”^[26]

The last part of the above-mentioned *ḥadīth*, “eat what is in front of you,” denotes that one should eat from the food that is in one's plate and not reach over another person's plate at mealtime to take food that is not within reach. These words also imply that one should eat sufficient food, so that the maintenance of bodily strength and health can be facilitated, and that the food should be nutritious.

Muḥammad al-Ghazzālī mentions in his treatise, *The Propriety of Eating* that small portions of food should be

eaten at a time and that one should chew the food well. The Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) has said about eating, “A few small portions of food that will allow the child of Ādam to maintain his/her strength are sufficient. If he/she has to eat, then one-third (of the stomach) should be reserved for food, one-third should be reserved for drinking and one-third for breathing.”^[27]

According to al-Ghazzālī, other forms of etiquette while eating include:

- Eating on the floor in a sitting position;
- Gazing less at those who are present there;
- To avoid eating while in a laying down position;
- Abstaining from overeating after the stomach has had its fill;

- To apologise if one has eaten one's fill so that nobody feels uncomfortable, neither a guest, nor anyone who has something else to do afterwards;
- To eat from the sides of bread and not from the middle; and
- To lick one's fingers after one is done.^[28]

Anas ibn Mālik has reported that, "The Messenger of Allāh (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) neither ate at any table nor did he eat at a dining table. He never ate from a plate, a platter or a bowl."^[29]

The best position of the body during eating is when one is sitting. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) used to sit and eat, about which he remarked, "I do not eat while lying down. I am but a servant of Allāh and therefore, I eat like a servant does and I sit as a

servant does."^[30]

The scholars further recommend that one should not indulge in any conversation about death, which will in turn cause those who are there to feel trepidation and stop them from finishing the meal.

The same way of adopting respect is required when drinking. In addition, it is recommended that one should look into the container before drinking anything, utter the name of Allāh and praise Him afterwards. The drink has to be consumed slowly without gulping and it should be tasted before swallowing. One should breathe three times while drinking, and praise Allāh after completing it. If someone praises Allāh when drinking something then those present should respond by asking Allāh to have mercy on that person. No one ought to drink anything while in a standing position. Food should first be offered

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to the person on the right if there are others present.^[31]

This overview concerns the required etiquette that Muslims should observe during the acts of eating and drinking. The Islamic regulations on *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām* foods further compliment Islam's homily on the sedateness of food consumption.

e) *Ḥalāl* (lawful) and *ḥarām* (unlawful) foods in Islam

The Islamic legislation communicates to us the various types of foods and drinks that Muslims are permitted or otherwise, prohibited to consume, which are stipulated in this manner for the general benefit of humanity at large. The holy *Qur'ān* explicitly imparts a profound instruction concerning food, “Oh people! Eat of what the earth contains of lawful, pure foods and do not

emulate the footsteps of the devil. Surely, he is an open enemy to you.”^[32]

This Qur'anic verse clearly explains the nature of food that we must consume. Two terms need to be explained in this context: Firstly, what is lawful food; and secondly, what is pure food?

Amira Ayad enlightens us on the concept of lawful food in the Qur'anic context:

There are two conditions for the food to be *ḥalāl* according to Islamic law: Firstly, the money you bought it with or the source you obtained it from has to be purely lawful and legally earned. There is a *ḥadīth* related by Abū Hurayrah (may Allāh be well pleased with him), in which the Messenger of Allāh (may Allāh send salutations and peace upon him) said: “Allāh, the Almighty,

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is Good and accepts only that which is good. And verily, Allāh has commanded the believers to do that which He has commanded the Messengers. So the Almighty says: “Oh you Messengers! Eat of the good foods, which Allāh has made legal (meat of slaughtered eatable animals, milk products, fats, vegetables, fruits, etc.) and do righteous deeds. Verily, I am Well-Acquainted with what you do.”^[33]

In light of this verse, Islam advocates that the produce of animals deemed as *ḥalāl* such as the milk and the skin, is likewise lawful for consumption and utilisation. All products thus manufactured from such produce (for e.g. cheese) are also acknowledged as lawful, as long as they are not mixed with any unlawful substance. On the other hand, the produce of animals deemed as *ḥarām* as well as

any products manufactured from this produce, also become unlawful for consumption and utilisation.^[34]

The instruction of the holy *Qur’ān* is wholly apparent concerning foods, which Islam has verified as lawful for consumption:

Oh you who have faith! Do not make unlawful the pure things that Allāh has made lawful for you, and do not transgress beyond the limits. Certainly, Allāh does not love those who transgress beyond the limits. Eat from what Allāh has provided as pure, lawful sustenance for you. Be conscious of Allāh in Whom you have faith.^[35]

These verses imply that no one is allowed to declare illegal foods that Allāh has made lawful in the holy *Qur’ān*. Amr Khaled elucidates on the connotations of these verses in his exegesis on the holy *Qur’ān*, by highlighting several

main ideas that this particular Qur'anic chapter denotes, revolving around the concept of *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām*. These principles include food, drink, quarry, slaughter, family and marriage, faith, prescribed acts of charity and fasting, principles of worship, verdicts, judiciary rules, testimonies, the realisation of justice, as well as relations between Muslims and Christians and between Muslims and Jews. "All matters discussed in the Qur'anic chapter are interrelated with the name of the Qur'anic chapter (*al-Mā'idah*: the dining table), and the rules of *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām* must be attentively observed, although food is a biological necessity."^[36]

The holy *Qur'ān* is explicit in the manner that it clarifies all foods that are forbidden:

Forbidden to you as food are: Meat of dead animal, blood, flesh of swine, that which was

honoured with the name of anyone other than Allah's, that which was killed by strangling, beating, by a fall, by goring or by devouring of wild beasts; unless you had purified it. Also forbidden is that which was slaughtered on idol-altars and that which was divided by raffling with divining arrows. All these are sinful acts.^[37]

In the above-mentioned verse eleven items are named as *ḥarām*, of which six are explicitly unlawful. The one who indulges in any one of these six will have committed a grave sin. No Muslim scholar has ever disputed the unlawfulness of the consumption of these eleven items. Yūsuf al-Qarḍāwī, a Muslim scholar of the current age, elucidates on the wisdom and benefits of this prohibition.^[38]

The remaining five items mentioned in the verse

comprise of animals that were strangled or choked. Additionally, if the neck of the animal was twisted, if the animal was beaten, stabbed or molested, or if it was injured by a fall or an accident of any kind, then the same rule would apply. In similar fashion, any animal that was pierced by the horns of other animals during fights, or partly eaten by wild animals are considered unlawful.

“These five types of injuries may lead one to assume that the animal is dead. If actually dead, its blood would have mixed with the meat, thus making it *Haraam*. But if there is a flicker of life (any reflex movement) in the animal, and you take Allah’s name (*tasmiyah*) and slaughter it (*zakkaytum/tazkiyah*), you would be purifying it by letting blood flow out, thus making it *Halaal* (lawful).”^[39]

The Islamic legislation also permits the hunting of animals, and any animal that is injured or killed during hunting is lawful for consumption. This rule only applies to animals hunted for food, but not for the purpose of amusement as a game of sport. The employment of modern stunning methods for strong animals is allowed with certain conditions. Firstly, the animal must be slaughtered while it is still alive. Secondly, the jugular veins must be cut so that the blood can flow. Islam certainly permits the method of stunning but prefers that the animal should be slaughtered instead, since the stunning may cause pain to the animal or be a cause of blood clotting.^[40]

All grazing animals (herbivores) whose only food is vegetation (e.g. plants, fruit and nuts) are considered as lawful in the holy *Qur’ān*, “Oh you who have faith, fulfil all

obligations. Lawful unto you, are all four-footed animals, except that which has been named, excluding animals of the chase while you are in the sacred precincts or in pilgrim garb. Verily, Allāh commands according to His will and plan.”[\[41\]](#)

Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī has produced a meritorious scholarly work on the analysis of fifty prophetic traditions, *Jāmi’ al-‘Ulūm wa al-Ḥikam*. One such *ḥadīth*, on which he expounds on in his book, is the declaration of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him), which was reported by al-Nu’mān ibn Bashīr (may Allāh be well pleased with him):

Indeed, *Ḥalāl* is clearly identified and *Ḥarām* is clearly identified, and in between there are ambiguous matters, about which not many people are knowledgeable. He who avoids these

doubtful matters certainly clears himself concerning his faith and honour. However, one who falls into these doubtful matters falls into that which is unlawful, like a shepherd who pastures around a sanctuary, all but grazing therein. Behold! Every king has a sanctuary, and the sanctuary of Allāh is His prohibitions. Behold! In the body is a piece of flesh, which, if it is sound, all of the body is sound. However, if it is contaminated, all of the body is contaminated. This part of the body is the heart.[\[42\]](#)

The holy *Qur’ān* contains a few verses that deliberate on those animals used for riding purposes:

As for cattle, He has created it for you, wherefrom you derive warmth and numerous benefits, and you eat of their meat. You also have

a sense of beauty of them as you drive them home in the evening and as you lead them to pasture in the morning. Moreover, they carry your heavy loads to lands that you could not reach otherwise, except by experiencing distress to yourselves. Your Creator is indeed, Most Compassionate, Most Merciful. He has further, created horses, mules and donkeys for you to ride and to use for show, and He has created other things of which you have no knowledge.^[43]

The Qur'anic scope clearly informs us that carnivorous animals and birds that eat meat are unlawful for a Muslim to consume. The opposite may be accepted about animals and birds that do not eat meat and only partake of vegetation and insects. Therefore, such creatures are considered as lawful for consumption,

provided they undergo the stages of *Tazkiyah* (purification and the bloodletting). This permissibility includes insects such as locusts, based on the report of 'Abd-Allāh ibn 'Umar (may Allāh be well pleased with him) on the authority of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him), "Two kinds of creatures that are found dead and two kinds of blood have been made lawful for you. The two kinds of dead creatures are fish and locusts, while the two types of blood are liver and spleen."^[44]

Muslim scholars have furthermore, relied upon the following *ḥadīth* of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) as well, which relates to *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām*:

"Whatever Allāh has stipulated as lawful in His book, is lawful and whatever He has stipulated as

unlawful, is lawful. Additionally, whatever He has not made mention of has been exonerated by Him. So accept the exoneration of Allāh, because it is beneath Allāh to forget (or neglect) anything. Then the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) recited the following Qur'anic verse: "And your Creator is not forgetful in the least."[\[45\]](#)

The wisdom behind Islam legislating lawful foods and drinks is complimented in the fact that they contain great nutritional value. This value has been expounded upon in the holy *Qur'ān*, as well as in the prophetic *Sunnah*, interlinked with the usability and the permissibility of these foods and drinks. Allāh has conferred these blessings upon human beings, so that they can derive maximum benefit, thereby existing harmoniously. In this way, they

can build the earth and disseminate these blessings.

f) The nutritional value of some types of foods and drinks

Islam has established the principle of natural usability and the permissibility of things. Allāh implores us in the holy *Qur'ān* to reflect on His favours, "Do you not see that Allāh has subjected to you whatever is in the heavens and what is on earth and has showered upon you His favours, both apparent and unseen?"[\[46\]](#)

Food and drink are part of these favours that Allāh has endowed upon His creation. In the English dictionary, the word "eat" is defined as to, "*Put (food) into the mouth, and chew and swallow it.*" Another definition offered by the dictionary is, "*to have a meal.*"[\[47\]](#)

Islam strongly recommends that one should consume

nutritious food that will maximise the benefits to the human body and health. In some cases, where harmful food or that of less nutritious value can prove to be detrimental to one's health and personal wellbeing, it becomes an obligation to eat food of rich nutritious value.

Eating (and/or drinking) can be classified into two categories from the Islamic perspective:

- 1) Biological eating; (and)
- 2) Sensual eating

Biological eating implies eating for sustenance. It is eating to build and maintain body cells, regulate body processes and supply energy and stamina. An example of biological eating would be eating nutritious food when you are hungry.^[48]

The prophetic *Sunnah* comprises of an immense amount of profound selections on foods and drinks that

formed part of the diet of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him). These expositions are contained not only in the holy *Qur'ān* and in the traditional compilations of the *Sunnah*, but also in the works of numerous scholars who produced books, treatises, discourses, commentaries and marginal notes on the science of prophetic medicine (*al-Ṭibb al-Nabawī*).^[49]

Ibn Mājah narrates in his *Sunan*, on the authority of al-Miqdām ibn Ma'd Yakrib who said:

I heard the Messenger of Allāh (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) stating: No human being can ever fill a container that will be more to his detriment than his own belly. A few bites to satisfy one's hunger are enough for a person to eat. If one's vain desires overpower his/her will, then one-third of the belly should be

reserved for food, another third for drinking and another third for air breathed in.^[50]

It is therefore, a requirement of food consumption, that one should eat food that caters for one's basic needs, thereby proving to be good, suitable, balanced and healthy. This kind of food would be regarded as nutritious food. Nutritionists term biological eating as 'eating right', since it involves two aspects, i.e. the quality and the quantity of food.

The *Sunnah* contains details on various forms of dietary exercises and numerous kinds of foods and drinks recommended for consumption. The holy *Qur'ān* also deliberates much on these practices, as well as on the contents of these foods and drinks.

Islam regards the act of fasting as one of the best medicines for the human body. It is for this reason, among

other reasons, that fasting during the month of *Ramaḍān* has been prescribed as an obligatory religious duty in the holy *Qur'ān*, representing one of the five essential pillars of Islam. The Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) would observe voluntary fasts regularly as well and greatly recommended it to his followers. One is further encouraged to eat nutritious food before commencing the day of fasting, as well as after breaking it.

The following foods and drinks constituted a major portion of the Prophet Muhammad's (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) diet and his regular intake: Water, dates, honey, cucumbers, milk, the black seed, yoghurt, sopped bread, vinegar, olive oil and barley. I will discuss the benefits of the first five kinds of foods, namely, water, dates, honey, cucumbers and milk below:

The holy *Qur'ān* contains many verses related to water and its benefits. The following kinds of water are lawful for the purposes of purification and drinking: rainwater, the ocean, spring water, wells, hail, snow and rivers. Water that is considered as lawful for ablution also qualifies for drinking. All types of water retain their original properties, without having any specific colour, taste or smell, as long as the water is not exposed to any substance. If this action does take place, then Islam deems it as either pure or impure, depending on the effect that the process of change has on the water.^[51]

Islam considers the purest of water on earth to be the well of *Zam-Zam*, which is located at the holy *Ka'bah* in Mecca, the birthplace of Islam and of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him). The well of *Zam-Zam* was discovered during the time of

Prophet Ibrāhīm (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him), the father of the Prophet Ismā'īl (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him).^[52]

The Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) is reported to have said regarding the *Zam-Zam* well, “The water of *Zam-Zam* fulfils the purpose for which it is drank.” This *ḥadīth* implies that one who drinks its water with a specific intention in mind and has full trust in Allāh, imploring Him to grant one's request, will reap fruitful results therefrom.^[53]

The eating of dates causes great benefit to the human body. The holy *Qur'ān* refers to the event of the birth of Prophet 'Īsā (peace and blessings upon him), making mention of the hardship his mother, Maryam, endured during pregnancy:

The pangs of childbirth drove her to the trunk of

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The pangs of childbirth drove her to the trunk of

a date palm. She exclaimed, “If only I had died before this moment, and I had become forgotten and out of sight!” Then Jibrīl called out to her from below, “Do not grieve! Your Lord has provided a water stream beneath you. Shake the trunk of the date palm towards you and it will cause fresh ripe dates to fall upon you. So eat, drink and be comfortable. If you see any human being, then say, “Indeed, I have vowed to fast for the Most Gracious and hence, I shall not speak to any human being today.”^[54]

The Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) stated about dates, “A family that has dates in their home will never be hungry.”^[55]

In another narration, the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) said about the ‘Ajwah

date (a special kind of date that only grows in Medina), “Whosoever eats seven ‘Ajwah dates in the morning will not be harmed by poison or magic on that day.”^[56]

The Reader’s Digest encyclopaedia, *Foods that Harm Foods that Heal*, mentions that dates contain a useful source of vitamin C, are rich in Potassium (when dried) and serve as a gentle laxative. Dried dates are also a more concentrated source of nutrients such as niacin, copper, iron and magnesium.^[57] Dates are therefore, a very nourishing food, both when fresh and dry.

The Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) used to love to eat cucumbers with fresh dates. In his work on *Prophetic Medicine*, ibn Qayyim al-Joziyyah explains that cucumbers quench one’s thirst, calm an inflamed stomach, are beneficial for bladder pains, can be used as a remedy for fainting and

have diuretic seeds. The leaves of the cucumber can be utilised as a bandage for wounds caused by dog bites. He also says further that cucumbers should be eaten with dates, raisins or honey, as the negative effects on the stomach will then be removed.^[58]

Honey was also one of the favourite foods of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him). The holy *Qur'ān* makes mention of the bee and its production of honey in *Sūrah al-Naḥl*:

Your Lord inspired the bee, saying, “Take habitations in the mountains, the trees and in what human beings erect. Then, eat of all fruits and ensue the ways of your Creator, which have been made easy for you.” There comes forth from their bellies, a drink of varying colours, wherein lies healing for human beings. Surely, therein are

signs for people who think.^[59]

Abū Saʿīd (may Allāh be well pleased with him) reported:

A man went to the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) and told him: “The bowels of my brother are relaxed.” The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) replied: “Make him take honey.” The man’s brother then went away. The same man returned and said: “I have given him honey but he is not in a better state.” Twice more, he returned. On the third and fourth occasion, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) said: “Allāh has been truthful; the belly of your brother has lied.” Thereafter, he gave him honey yet again to eat and he was cured.^[60]

Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī comments on this ḥadīth in his work, *The Medicine of the Prophet*:

Muslim writes: “Verily, my brother was squeamish in his belly, his digestion was upset and his stomach was ailing. His squeamishness was disturbing him. So, the saying: “The belly of your brother has lied,” implied that it was not enough to eat honey only once or twice. For that man’s diarrhoea was the flux. So the Prophet prescribed honey for him. For it is the nature of honey to drive away the residue of what is collected in the stomach and bowel.”^[61]

Hence, there is no doubt that honey holds great benefits for the human body, and for the health of a human being.

The Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings of

Allāh upon him) was very fond of milk and used to like to drink the milk of a camel. He is reported have said about this milk, “Therein, lies a cure for those who have stomach ailments, in the milk and the urine of camels.”^[62]

Some companions of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) used to drink goat milk, which holds similar remedial effects as camel milk. In the *Academic Journal of Nutrition*, Tilahun Zenebe et al. expound on the nutritional values of goat milk. These values include milk lipids, proteins, carbohydrates, minerals and vitamins, which are beneficial to the immune system and to the removal of toxins from the human body. The milk of a goat also contains minerals that help to sustain healthy skin.^[63]

There are many other kinds of food that the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings of Allāh upon him) used

to partake of such as meat, poultry and fish. He also used to like to eat fruits such as grapes, pomegranates and melons. The Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings of Allāh upon him) would always partake of food and drink in moderation. Islam places great emphasis on following a well-balanced diet, so that one may remain healthy and so that the body can retain its strength.

These Islamic traditions are further articulated in the feeding practices of Muslims throughout history. Muslims believe that eating routines, which are corroborated in the holy *Qur'ān* and in the prophetic *Sunnah*, should also be implemented in strategies employed during the provision of food to the poor.

g) The practices of Muslims in feeding the poor

All religions regard the act of showing concern to the poor as a fundamental religious duty. Researchers in all fields of knowledge relating to socioeconomic studies seek to analyse and describe the behaviour of poor and rich people. A study completed in 2016 brings the notion of poverty and wealth in three major religions, i.e. Judaism, Christianity and Islam into perspective by highlighting the respect shown by researchers to religious proponents:

What religious people do and say is important to them because their beliefs about poor and rich people are essential to their identity – the core of their religious message disappears without their tradition of preaching and caring for rich and poor. Love of one's neighbour is central to the message they purport to bring from God; love of their poor neighbour is part of that message.

Take away that part of their sacred word to us and their sacred text loses the core of its message.^[64]

The spending of one's wealth can take the form of monetary value, food, clothing or other basic needs. This spending can be taken from *Zakāh*, an obligatory form of charity, which is the minimum required amount that a Muslim must spend for the sake of Allāh. Muslims are highly encouraged to offer voluntary forms of charity to the poor, which can be spent without any limitation and according to one's means.

Al-Bukhārī narrated on the authority of 'Abd-Allāh ibn 'Umar (may Allāh be well pleased with them) that the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) stated, "Islam is established on five pillars: to testify that there is none worthy of worship except Allāh and that

Muḥammad is the messenger of Allāh, to perpetually observe the *Ṣalāh*, to pay the *Zakāh*, to undertake the pilgrimage and to observe fasting during *Ramaḍān*."^[65]

These are the minimal required devotional practices of exoteric Islam. Collectively, they are referred to as *'ibādah* because they indicate and affirm the worshipper's status as a servant (*'abd*) before God. All of these actions require the worshipper to first make an intention to perform them (*nīyah*), thus affirming the doctrine of human responsibility inherent in the doctrine of *qiyāmah*. All of the actions of the *'ibādah* result in *thawāb*, or spiritual benefit, for the worshipper.^[66]

Moreover, a Muslim's success is guaranteed on condition that he/she abides by the commands of the holy

Qur'ān and the prophetic *Sunnah* concerning the five essential tenets of Islam. The holy *Qur'ān* highlights the supplication of the Prophet Mūsā (peace be upon him) who appealed to Allāh to bestow His mercy and blessings upon him, and upon his community:

Ordain good for us in this world, and in the hereafter. Certainly, we have fully turned towards You. Allāh replied, “I will afflict My punishment on whom I will, and My mercy embraces all things. I will ordain it for those who safeguard themselves against evil who give *Zakāh* and believe in Our signs.^[67]

In addition, Allāh took a covenant from the people of the Prophet Mūsā (peace be upon him), after saving them from the oppressive pharaoh of Egypt. They were instructed to uphold the teachings of the *Torāh* (the

scripture that was revealed to them), by worshipping Allāh and by being of service to His creation:

And remember when We took a covenant from the Children of Israel, saying, “Worship none but Allāh, without ascribing any partners to Him and be dutiful and good to parents, kindred, orphans and to the poor. Speak well to people, perform prayers and give *Zakāh*. Then you turned back, except a few of you, reverting completely away from the truth.^[68]

The same foundation was laid in the revelation granted to the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) who demonstrated these values during his entire life and authentically imparted them to his companions (may Allāh be well pleased with them). They effusively implemented these Islamic values and

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abided by them throughout the course of their lives. Al-Ghazzālī quotes an authentic prophetic tradition highlighting the practice of feeding others: “The best of you are those who feed others.”^[69]

Ismā’īl ibn Muṣṭafā al-Khalwatī al-Barūsawī (d. 1127H/1715), similarly highlights the Islamic custom of feeding in his work on Qur’anic exegesis by stating:

All forms of obedience to Allah are contained in two matters. The first one concerns obedience to the commands of Allah, which is expressed in the verse: “They are loyal to their oath,” (Q. 76:7). The second one relates to the display of compassion to the creation of Allah, which is expressed in the verse: “And they provide food to the poor.”^[70]

The practice of Muslims in making food available to

the poor stems from the lifestyle of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) who founded the first Muslim community in Medina after his migration from Mecca. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) first initiated the building of a mosque soon after his arrival in Medina. The reason for this establishment of the mosque being the first priority was so that it could serve the core of the Muslim community. The early Muslim community in Medina used to partake of food together, as well as observe the fasting of *Ramaḍān* and break the fast in unison. They would also see to the needs of the poor by providing them with food and by giving the poor preference over themselves.

Subsequently, the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) inaugurated the opening of the state treasury (*Bayt al-Māl*) and appointed persons

in charge of managing its resources. Those Muslims who were of the means supplied the treasury with food and made generous contributions to the welfare of their community. This document is known as the *Constitution of Medina* and has been widely published in countless historical accounts on Islam.^[71]

The rights of neighbours were of paramount importance, and each resident of Medina enjoyed these rights. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) taught the masses the necessity of seeing to the needs of neighbours by announcing: “He does not truly believe in me who sleeps full-fed while his neighbour is hungry and he knows it.”^[72]

The Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) also made it very clear to them on the meaning of brotherhood: “None of you will truly believe

until he loves for his brother whatever he loves for himself.”^[73]

The holy *Qur’ān* emphasises it as a character trait of intense faith that the poor should be treated with kindness and compassion, and that their basic needs should be fulfilled, “And they give food in spite of love for it to the needy, the orphan and the captive. Their purpose is that, “We feed you only for the countenance of Allah. We wish not from you any reward or gratitude. Indeed, we fear from our Lord a day austere and distressful.”^[74]

These verses were revealed concerning an event that took place in Medina. ‘Aṭā, a scholar from amongst the followers of the Prophet’s companions (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon all of them) narrates the following parable on the authority of ‘Ibn ‘Abbās:

‘Alī ibn Abū Ṭālib (may Allāh be well pleased with

him) worked in his garden one evening, by watering the date trees and harvesting some barley. In the morning, he accumulated the barley and cooked one-third of it with flour. The family members of his household prepared the barley into what was called *al-Khazīrah*. When it was ready to be eaten, a needy person knocked on the door and they gave him the food. Because of that, they prepared a second third of the barley. When it was ready, an orphan knocked on the door, to which they gave the food. Then, they made the remaining third of the barley and when they were about to eat it, a captive who was an idolater came, to whom they gave the food. They ended up having nothing to eat on that day. These verses were revealed relating to that event.^[75]

There is another event as well, which the same verses of the holy *Qur'ān* relate to, according to some historians and scholars of Qur'anic exegesis. Muḥammad 'Alī al-Ṣābūnī comments on these verses by noting that some of the idolaters of *Quraysh* were seized as captives during the battle:

Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī said, “The captives were taken to the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) who would place them in the custody of some of the Muslims and instruct them by saying: “Treat him well.” The captive would remain in the custody of that person for two or three days, and he would give the captive preference over himself.

Allāh, the Most High, brings to our attention that righteous personalities like these purely provide

the food to those who are in adverse conditions, despite the fact that they may need it to fulfil their own hunger and that of their dependants. They readily prefer the underprivileged to themselves, as in the verse, “And they prefer others over themselves, even if they are in dire need.”^[76]

Moreover, there are instances when the provision of food to the poor becomes a greater obligation on Muslims who can afford to do so. An example of such an obligation would be in the case when a poverty-stricken person is afflicted with a life-threatening illness. If faced with starvation, he/she could die or his/her condition could deteriorate further. Feeding this person would then be deemed as an obligation by Islam. The offering of food to the poor is also regarded as a religious obligation at

occasions and events of an Islamic nature where food is served, for e.g. the Friday prayers. On the other hand, offering food to guests and eating with them is not obligatory but a meritorious and commendable act.

Muhammad al-‘Areefy vindicates these principles, by explaining that the concept of generosity and the purpose of life rotates around the act of giving to others more than we take for ourselves.^[77]

This practice has been perpetuated by Muslims throughout history and has been fostered into the running of Muslim organisations, where feeding programmes form a core function of the programmes maintained by such organisations. Today, poverty eradication projects weigh the heaviest on the scales of social welfare amongst Muslim communities and in Muslim faith-based organisation

Many Muslim organisations also run their own agricultural schemes, ensuring that their work produces full advantage to the community that they serve. The aim of these multi-dimensional projects is to ensure that the earth is cultivated and developed in a meaningful way, which not only allows human society to prosper but also nature and the environment as well. The entire earth has been made as a place of worship. These sentiments are expounded on by ‘Umar ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Qurayshi, in his publication entitled *Islamic Tolerance*, in which he stresses:

The worship sanctioned by Islam does not interfere with practical goals. On the contrary, it is man’s duty to build up, civilize and inhabit the earth. Prayer, *Zakāh* (paying the obligatory poor-tax), fasting and pilgrimage are simultaneously

individual, as well as social acts of worship. They neither alienate the Muslim from life nor from society. In fact, these acts of worship aim to strengthen the ties between the individual and the community, emotionally and practically. It is for this reason that monasticism was not ordained by Islam, for monasticism isolates the individual from life and its pleasures, preventing him from fulfilling the obligation to cultivate and develop the earth.^[78]

The cultivation and the development of the earth can only be implemented if one is compassionate and tolerant towards others. Hence, it is imperative that each individual assists in the enrichment of society and participates in the nurturing and in the enlightenment of others.^[79]

Islam addresses the issue of social solidarity largely and regards the act of feeding as the most meritorious act of expressing kindness to others. Moreover, Islam indeed obligates that Muslims should give charity as an essential religious principle when the need exists. The obligatory charity of *Zakāh* as one of the fundamental pillars of Islam was stipulated as such for establishing social justice, thereby ensuring social solidarity. Equality cannot exist in any society without justice. It is not strange, therefore, that the Islamic ruling concerning a Muslim who has the means to pay his/her due *Zakāh* but does not uphold this obligation, is that such a Muslim has directly violated an explicit Qur'anic injunction.^[80]

Islam further stipulates the categories of recipients who are eligible to receive *Zakāh*. These categories are: the poor, the needy, those who are employed to collect it, for

bringing hearts together, for the freeing of captives or slaves, for those in debt, for the cause of Allāh and for the stranded traveller.^[81]

This verse unequivocally states the first two categories of recipients who are also the most eligible to receive *Zakāh*, i.e. the poor and the needy. An analysis of the definitions of these two terms in the context of their usage in the holy *Qur'ān* and the prophetic *Sunnah*, denotes that the poor are those who have very little to survive on, while the needy do not possess anything at all for survival.^[82]

Additionally, it is a common exercise amongst Muslims that the recipients of *Zakāh* may utilise it for the fulfilment of their basic needs like clothing and shelter but in most cases today monies collected from *Zakāh* are used to purchase food, groceries or food items for the poor.

Sayyid Qutb highlights the importance of a Muslim

community catering for the needs of the poor:

The community is responsible for the provision of a competence for its poor and destitute members; it has the care of the money of *Zakāt* and of its expenditure on various objects. If this is not enough, the rich are obliged to contribute as much as will meet the wants of the needy; there is no restriction and no condition, except that there shall be sufficiency. If any individual passes the night hungry, the blame attaches to the community because it did not bestir itself to feed him. “Nay, but you do not honour the orphan, nor do you urge the feeding of the poor; you eat up the inheritance altogether, and you love wealth with an excessive love.”^[83]

Hence, Islam obligates the paying of the due amount

of *Zakāh* to its worthy recipients, and accentuates on the act of spending wealth by giving charity, largely. These kinds of donations generally fall under *Ṣadaqah* (voluntary charity), which Muslims are encouraged to make available to worthy recipients, by providing them with food. The Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) is reported to have stated regarding feeding: “Feed the hungry, visit the sick, and free the prisoner.”^[84]

The holy Qur’ān explicitly states the virtue of giving to the poor, and the merit of those who do so:

Whatever you spend of your wealth, or whatever vow you make, be sure that Allāh knows it well. There are no helpers for those who commit oppression. If you disclose your alms giving, it is well, but if you conceal it, and give it to the poor,

then that is better for you. Allāh will forgive you some of your sins. Allāh is Well-Acquainted with your deeds. Their guidance is not your duty, but Allāh guides whom He wills. Hence, whatever you spend in good is for yourselves, as long you spend only in seeking Allah's countenance. In addition, whatever you spend in good, will be repaid to you in full, and you shall not be harmed in the least. Charity is for the poor who are restricted in Allah's cause, and cannot move about in the land for trade and work. The one who does not know them thinks that they are rich because of their modesty. You may know them by their mark. They do not beg from people at all. Whatever you spend in good, surely, Allāh knows it well. Those who spend their wealth in Allah's cause, by night and day, and in secret, and in

public, shall have their reward with their Lord.

No fear will be on them, nor shall they grieve.^[85]

The way that the holy *Qur'ān* commends those who exercise social giving has encouraged Muslims to open many organisations, of which the entire purpose is to offer feeding to the poor. Muslims and Muslim faith-based organisations make food available to the poor throughout the year, especially during the event of the commemoration of the Prophet Muhammad's birth (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him), during the fasting month of *Ramaḍān*, and during the two festivals. Muslims try to carry out regular feeding practices at all religious programmes, in obedience to the instructions of the holy *Qur'ān* and in emulation of the example of their Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him). Food itself holds a symbolic meaning in Islam.

In the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, the following points are mentioned on this symbolic meaning:

Islam stands out among religions by involving no food or drink in its ordinary services of worship. Eating plays an important ritual and social role in the fasting month of *Ramadan*, when each day ends at sunset with an *iftar* meal that breaks the fast; these meals traditionally begin with figs, following the example of the Prophet... One of the main holidays of Islam, the *ʿId al-Adha* during the month of pilgrimage to Mecca, involves the sharing of food because each Muslim household is obligated to sacrifice a goat, sheep, ram, cow, or camel and distribute one-third of the meat to the poor.^[86]

The fasting month of *Ramaḍān* is the period of the

year when Muslims express an extra sense of caring for others, and observe an additional amount of generosity in giving towards the poor. For this reason, *Ramaḍān* is known as the month of giving.

The act of feeding is highly regarded in Islam as a fundamental principle of the religious duty of a Muslim. In the *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Non-profit Organizations*, attention is drawn to the practice of generosity and philanthropy amongst Muslims:

Contributing to charity is one of the basic tenets of Islam. All Muslims are obliged to contribute 2.5% of their yearly income toward community improvement, especially supporting those who are indigent. This is called *Zakat* and is called to address socioeconomic problems among Muslims. Among Muslims nations, such

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year when Muslims express an extra sense of caring for others, and observe an additional amount of generosity in giving towards the poor. For this reason, *Ramaḍān* is known as the month of giving.

The act of feeding is highly regarded in Islam as a fundamental principle of the religious duty of a Muslim. In the *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Non-profit Organizations*, attention is drawn to the practice of generosity and philanthropy amongst Muslims:

Contributing to charity is one of the basic tenets of Islam. All Muslims are obliged to contribute 2.5% of their yearly income toward community improvement, especially supporting those who are indigent. This is called *Zakat* and is called to address socioeconomic problems among Muslims. Among Muslims nations, such

contributions are regulated by the state and institutions called the *Baitul Mal* were responsible for collecting and allocating this compulsory charity. There are also other forms of giving among Muslims, which also support causes outside the community (Khan, 2004).^[87]

The bulk of the funds collected from *Zakāh* and from other forms of charity in Islam, is utilised for the provision of food to the poor. Countless Muslim and non-Muslim scholars have taken cognisance of the magnitude of this importance, and therefore, an immeasurable obtainability of scholarship is accessible today on the providing of food in general, as well as on the virtues of catering to the needs of the poor.

Jan Narveson states in his article on welfare and wealth, “Thus, wealth is usually pretty useful for securing

welfare – though by no means always. And it is presumably true that concerns for the poor are primarily motivated by an interest in their welfare, to which their wealth would be a means.”^[88]

h) The concept of food security in Islam

In Islam, food security can be understood, as explained by M.M. Farouk et al.:

Islam has no direct definition of food or nutrition security in the modern sense. However, the converse state of insecurity can be inferred from the Quran’s description of a truly hungry person. According to scholars and linguists, a poor person (*faqīr*) is someone who cannot find sufficient food to meet his and his family’s needs

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for half a year, and a needy person (*miskin*) is someone who can only find half of what will suffice most of the time. These people lack food security and are qualified recipients of zakat, the Islamic obligatory charity, and tithing.^[89]

Every human being has the right to his/her own dignity. For this reason, Islam places significant emphasis on the importance of food security prevailing amongst all creatures. Allāh has taken the sustenance of all creatures as His own responsibility and He has promised to provide for them, for as long as they exist, “There is not a single creature that traverses through the earth, for which Allāh has not taken it upon Himself to provide sustenance. He knows the time and place of its definite abode and its temporary deposit. All is in a clear record.”^[90]

In his translation and commentary on the holy

Qur’ān, Yusuf ‘Ali explains the above-mentioned verse as follows:

Nothing happens in creation except by the word of God and with the knowledge of God. Not a leaf stirs but by His will. Its maintenance in every sense is dependent on His will. *Mustaqarr* = definite abode; where a thing stops or stays for some time, where it is established. *Mustauda’* = where a thing is laid or deposited for a little while. Referring to animals, the former denotes its life on this earth, the latter its temporary pre-natal existence in the egg or the womb and its after-death existence in the tomb or whatever state it is in until its resurrection.^[91]

This concept of how Allāh has guaranteed sustenance to His entire creation epitomises a chief principle of

survival on this earth. Therefore, human beings who have been endowed with intellect and choice must, acknowledge that everything belongs to Allāh ultimately, and that we are the custodians of His wealth and provisions. To act accordingly, recognising the duty of making nutritious food accessible and affordable to everyone, without any discrimination or distinction, means that one should render a sacrifice in one's own personal capacity, whether it is in the form of money, of time, of knowledge, of experience, or in other forms of donations. In contrast, the hoarding of wealth and food, and the plundering and abuse of earth's resources, constitute acts of selfishness towards others and utter disrespect to what Allāh has created and bestowed upon His creation.

‘Abd al-Ṣabūr Marzūq explains the concept of social

justice in Islam as follows:

The jurists have defined the limitation of a sufficient amount of provision to imply that the basic needs of a human being must be fulfilled, i.e. that he/she has a home to take as shelter and sufficient food. In addition, (he/she should also have) a servant, a means of transport through which he/she can complete his/her duties and a spouse that will assist him/her in observing pure abstinence from prohibited acts.

May Allāh be well pleased with ‘Umar, the commander of the faithful who crossed paths with an elderly Jewish man one day holding out his hands and begging from the people. When ‘Umar discovered the actual condition that the man was enduring, he held the man by his hand

and accompanied him to the state treasury of the Muslims. 'Umar then made the decision to give him a monthly stipend from the treasury.^[92]

In this way, Islam has created a balance between every individual and the state. Any person that undergoes the plights of starvation and poverty, thereby encountering illnesses such as malnutrition and anorexia, is denied his/her basic rights of survival. Muslim scholars who have studied the *Qur'ān*, the *Sunnah*, and Muslim literature and tradition, offer interpretations on how Islam's injunctions should be implemented in times of poverty, famine, drought and budget constraints. Much of these elucidations exist in the *Qur'ān* and in the *Sunnah* while others exist in the interpretations, books and studies of Muslim scholars who have made mention of many similar events throughout history, in which people

experienced drought and famine. They have offered solutions and presented strategies on how to restrain the difficulty of hunger in such situations.^[93]

Recent and contemporary studies conducted by Muslim scholars, as well as by scholars of other denominations, have made a profound impact on people, causing them to realise that the issue of hunger and poverty cannot simply be ignored and overlooked, as has been done in the past. This acknowledgement has caused humanitarians and relief workers to dedicate their lives to making food available to those who cannot afford it. As a result, many organisations have emerged in the last century, which manage and maintain social welfare and poverty alleviation projects.^[94]

i) Conclusion

This chapter covered a literature review on nutrition,

on food security and on the practice of feeding amongst Muslims. The sources of Islamic legislation were explained and relevant scholarly theories concerning nutrition and food security were expounded on.

Additionally, a discussion was rendered on the production and on the acquirement of food in the practices of Muslims today. An analysis on social solidarity in Islam was also provided and related historical events were accounted for. Thereafter, an overview was offered on lawful and unlawful foods in Islam, and on the nutritional value of certain types of foods and drinks.

This chapter culminated with an assessment of the Islamic outlook on food security, with particular focus on the situation in South Africa.

The next chapter will discuss the arrival of Islam in South Africa, with particular focus on the emergence of

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- [6] Ali Tarighat-Esfanjani and Namazi Nazli, "Nutritional Concepts and Frequency of Foodstuffs Mentioned in the Holy Quran," *Journal Of Religion & Health* 55, no. 3 (2016): 812, accessed on 25 August, 2017, <http://web.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.uwc.ac.za/ehost/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=6889c154-117f-4ef5->

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